

FRENCH INDO-CHINA

amount to be done, but the standard of judgment must always remain comparative. The French in Indo-China are between two fires. In the Annamite countries they are accused, and with reason, of having exercised too direct interference in native life; in Cambodia they ate criticized, and with reason, for having interfered too little and left the old disorder under a superficial re-organization. One of the real bases of French success is intangible: the restoration of their national dignity in Khmer eyes through the maintenance of royal prestige, through the restoration of former boundaries, through the renaissance of BuddhM scholarship, and the revival of national arts. France's sins of omission pale beside the great accomplishment of having restored a nation's self-confidence.

In regard to personal contacts, the French and Khmers find each other mutually congenial, and each has left a strong imprint on the other. The refusal of the majority of French to study the Cambodian language and culture not only hurts the national pride of the sensitive Khmer but is a source of misunderstanding between two peoples. Although much of the worst side of colonials is the same as in Annamite countries, because inherent in the nature of colonization, the French on the whole are liked and admired by the Cambodians. What differences exist are of so fundamental a nature that they belong to racial Occidental-Oriental viewpoints and are not specifically Franco-Cambodian.

Their mental outlook is fundamentally opposed. To the Khmers everything has a moral foundation. This life must be led virtuously because it relates to future happiness and is not the European concern with immediate materialistic content. European life seems to them

inconsistent: there is perpetual antithesis between
virtue and vice,
like poverty and wealth, pride and baseness, live
together with-
out appreciation of their inconsistency. How can
a European
distinguish public from private life and judge each by a
different standard?
A man cannot be impeccable in office who is
immoral as a private
man. To the simple Cambodians the French are
jacks, powerful
tyrannical demons, condemned to exhaust themselves in
diabolic
games discovering for themselves the secret of eternal
life. It is a **perpetual** source of surprise to Khmers of all
stations that
men of power and knowledge should lack simple
virtues. Khmers have tried to get beyond this stage of gentle
inquiry. **Those** Europeans who have tried to bridge **the**
gap between the French and the Khmer have themselves been
poisoned by
its
decadence.